

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LUSAKA 03229 031234Z

14
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----- 107930

P R 031200Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4563
INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LUBUMBASHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L LUSAKA 3229

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR ZA AO US
SUBJ: BENGUELA RAILROAD

REF: (A) LONDON 19241; (B) STATE 293176

1. PIECES OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE IN LUSAKA TEND
TO CONFIRM MANY OF HODD'S COMMENTS AS REPORTED REFTEL A.

2. IN A LENGTHY CONVERSATION A FEW DAYS AGO ON ANOTHER SUBJECT,
THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TOLD ME THAT AS ONE OF THE FEW FRENCH
SPEAKERS AT THE INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATION IN GABORONE IN OCTOBER
(WHERE HE IS ALSO ACCREDITED) HE HAD LONG CONVERSATIONS WITH
MOBUTU. THE LATTER STATED QUITE CLEARLY THAT HE WAS NOT PERMITTING
THE BENGUELA RAILROAD TO OPERATE IN ZAIRE FOR TWO REASONS:
FIRST THAT THE ANGOLANS WERE REQUIRING TOO HIGH A PRICE IN TERMS
OF CONCESSIONS FOR RE-ESTABLISHING THE TRAFFIC. SECOND, SAVIMBI
HAD MADE CLEAR TO HIM THAT IF THE RAILROAD RESUMED INTERNATIONAL
OPERATION HE WOULD NOT ONLY INTERDICT IT BUT INFLICT SERIOUS
DAMAGE ON IT.

3. WITH REGARD TO THE ANGOLAN-ZAMBIAN NEGOTIATIONS ON REOPENING
OF THE LINE, CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ZAMBIAN MINISTER OF TRANSPORT
AND MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, BOTH OF WHOM RECENTLY WERE ENGAGED
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PAGE 02 LUSAKA 03229 031234Z

IN THESE DISCUSSIONS, INDICATE THAT THE GRZ IS GENUINELY

ANXIOUS TO SEE THE LINE REOPENED AT LEAST TO RECOVER ITS PROPERTY. ZAMBIA HAS SOME 770 WAGONS AND 6 LOCOMOTIVES OF WHICH IT WOULD LIKE TO REGAIN POSSESSION. THERE IS, BESIDES, A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF COPPER WHICH WAS STRANDED ON ITS WAY TO LOBITO AND LARGE STORES OF IMPORTED INDUSTRIAL EQUIPMENT ON ITS WAY TO ZAMBIA. MUCH OF THIS EQUIPMENT HAS NOW REACHED LUSO. THE ZAMBIANS ARE HOPEFUL THAT IT CAN BE RECOVERED. IT IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED BY THE ZAMBIAN DELEGATION TO THE ZAIRE INDEPENDENCE CEREMONY IN LATE NOVEMBER. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT THE ZAMBIANS INTEREST IN THE BENGUELA RAILROAD EXTENDS BEYOND RECOVERY OF LOST PROPERTY. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES AVAILABLE TO THEM THROUGH TANZANIA, MALAWI AND MOZAMBIQUE, THOUGH SOMEWHAT LESS ECONOMICAL, ARE NEVERTHELESS ADEQUATE FOR THEIR PRESENT INTERNATIONAL TRADE NEEDS.

4. UNITA SOURCES HERE IN LUSAKA OF COURSE GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT IT INTERDICTS THE RAILROAD ALMOST AT WILL. ITS ACCOUNT, HOWEVER, OF ATTACKS ON TRAFFIC APPEAR TO CONFIRM THE CLAIM THAT THE RAILROAD IS IN AT LEAST LIMITED OPERATION WITHIN ANGOLA. ANOTHER SOURCE CLAIMS THAT THIS OPERATION ONLY GOES AS FAR AS HUAMBO BUT UNITA RAIDS SEEM TO BE BEYOND THAT AND THEREFORE INDICATE THAT SOME TRAFFIC CONTINUES UP AT LEAST AS FAR AS LUSO. LOW

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: COPPER, SABOTAGE, RAILROADS, FREIGHT RATES, LIBERATION FRONTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976LUSAKA03229
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760447-1105
From: LUSAKA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761275/aaaacngf.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 LONDON 19241, 76 STATE 293176
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <30 AUG 2004 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BENGUELA RAILROAD
TAGS: PFOR, ZA, AO, US, (MOBUTU SESE SEKO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006